
APPENDIX H: LAND USE

EXISTING CONDITIONS

York County is located in the Virginia Coastal Plain on a peninsula formed by the James and York Rivers and Chesapeake Bay. The County is a part of the Hampton Roads region which also includes the Cities of Hampton, Newport News, Poquoson and Williamsburg and James City County, all of which adjoin York County, together with the southside localities of Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Portsmouth, Chesapeake, Suffolk and Isle of Wight County. York County is closely linked to this much larger region. For example, much of the residential development that has occurred in the County is a result of the growth of major employment centers located within the Hampton Roads region, particularly those in the cities of Newport News and Hampton. With continued development/improvement of the transportation system, this trend will, in all probability, continue even with new job opportunities increasingly available in the County. The most important point is, however, that actions in neighboring localities can often affect land use decisions in York County and vice versa.

Of the 108 square miles contained within the County's jurisdictional limits, approximately 37% of the total land area is owned by the federal government. These Federal landholdings include military installations such as the Coast Guard Reserve Center, U. S. Naval Weapons Station, Cheatham Annex, and Camp Peary, totaling approximately 21,000 acres, and the Colonial National Historical Park (3,900 acres). In addition to these large federal landholdings, the Cities of Newport News and Williamsburg each own reservoirs and watershed property in the County. Together, these two cities own 6,600 acres in the County. The combination of federal and municipal lands accounts for 31,500 acres, which equates to 46% of the land area in York County. While presenting a number of constraints for the County, these landholdings do ensure that a relatively large amount of open space will be perpetuated, thus contributing positively to the County's quality of life and the perception of a rural atmosphere.

In 1957, the County adopted its first zoning ordinance but without the benefit of a comprehensive plan. Land development occurred accordingly, but with little thought for the future. By 1976, the first Land Use Plan was adopted. By 1983, when the 1976 Land Use Plan was updated, the pressures of growth and development were being felt and many citizens believed that the "rural" character of the County was being threatened. At that time, considerable attention was given to evaluating not only the various impediments to development, but also making decisions about the kind of community that the citizens ultimately wanted.

The process of creating a vision for the future always begins with an analysis of the existing conditions. Consequently, the following pages contain a summary of the various land uses within the County. The 1999 Existing Land Use Map shows the distribution of land uses throughout the County while **Table 33** summarizes the distribution by type of use. In these discussions, *gross area* means all of the land area in the County, whereas *non-military* land area excludes the 31.9% of the County comprising the military installations, and *gross developable* land area excludes both military and recreation/conservation land. Gross developable land area is 44% of the County's gross land area and includes both already developed and vacant land. It is important to note that the term gross developable land area as used in the discussion in this section also includes areas which, due to environmental characteristics (e.g., wetlands, slopes, etc.) or other factors, could actually be undevelopable.

The existing land use patterns reflect the presence or absence of a wide variety of constraints and opportunities in the County. These include environmental factors, the transportation network, utilities, and various real estate market forces. Details about these factors and their influence are in other elements of this Comprehensive Plan and are not repeated here.

Residential

By 1990, the amount of residentially developed land had increased to 11,566 acres, representing an increase of 40% from the 1981 total of 8,275 acres and accounting for approximately 24% of the County's non-military land area. The amount of residentially developed land increased by over two thousand acres between 1990 and 1999 but the majority of the development activity continued to be in the

single-family detached category as has been the case historically. No change in this preference for single-family detached housing is expected.

Medium- and high-density single-family uses have tended to be located in proximity to public utilities and where convenient access to major thoroughfares is available. Even though the designations of "medium" and "high" denote smaller lots, the conventional development lot sizes permitted in these areas vary from 13,500 square feet to 20,000 square feet and are considerably larger than the "medium" and "high" density lots in the neighboring cities of Hampton and Newport News. However, since the early 1990s, the predominant trend in single family detached residential development has been the use of the "cluster" or "open space subdivision" development technique where lots are even smaller but the total number allowed is no more than would be permitted under conventional subdivision practices.

Multi-family residential development encompasses high-density owner-occupied townhouse units, rental units (typically apartment-style units), units arranged in apartment or townhouse-style buildings in the condominium form of ownership, and federally owned multi-family units. Multi-family development occupies approximately 600 acres or 1.3% of the County's non-military land area.

Commercial

The 2,580 acres devoted to commercial land uses in 1999 represent 5% of the County's non-military land area. Significant acreage of new commercial development has been added to the County's land use inventory since 1990. Most commercial activities have developed in a linear fashion along the County's major transportation corridors: Route 17 in the lower County; and Routes 143 and 60 in the upper County. However, the Kiln Creek commercial area along Victory Boulevard provides an example of a different development pattern - the commercial node - which is a concept that has been promoted for many years in the County's land use policies because it allows vehicle trips between various uses in the "node" without having to return to an arterial highway.

For the purposes of this discussion, the County's commercial activities have been grouped into the following categories:

- **Neighborhood:** Neighborhood commercial activities are oriented primarily toward serving the day-to-day needs of residents of nearby areas. These are generally termed convenience activities since their business depends more on the convenience of the establishment to the shopper than to any comparative advantage over other establishments offering similar products.

In York County, neighborhood commercial activities are generally located in the centers of the older, well-established residential areas. These types of activities are found in Lackey, Seaford, Dare, and at the Queens Creek Road/Penniman Road intersection. While these existing uses represent a fairly insignificant percentage of the total developed acreage in the County, this type of convenience-oriented development provides a service to nearby residents.

This category also includes water-related activities that have historically held a very important position in York County's commercial base. Included under this category of commercial activities are the marinas located in the Dare, Seaford, Dandy, and Waterview areas as well as several boat-building operations and seafood businesses.

- **General:** The general commercial category encompasses a wide range of retail and service activities oriented primarily toward supplying goods or providing services to a community or regional market. A majority of the commercial activities in York County fall under this classification.

General commercial activities in the southern portion of the County are concentrated along Route 17. The Grafton, York Square, Heritage Square, Kiln Creek, Village Square, Washington Square and Patriots Square Shopping Centers are the major hubs of activity; however, numerous other establishments are interspersed between these along the Route 17 corridor. In addition to the Route 17 corridor, other general commercial activities include the Shady Banks Shopping Center, which is located along the Route 134 corridor near a concentration of higher density residential developments.

The Route 143 corridor from Penniman Road to the Williamsburg city line is the location of the James-York Plaza and Farm Fresh Shopping Centers, as well as numerous other free-standing establishments. This activity center serves not only the residents of York County, but also draws business from adjacent areas of Williamsburg and James City County. Also important in the Williamsburg area are the Kingsgate Greene, Village Shops and the Festival Marketplace Shopping Centers which are oriented toward capturing trade from nearby residents as well as tourist interests.

This category also include a large portion of the County's total developed commercial land area classified as "tourist commercial" in the 1991 plan. These tourist commercial activities are concentrated in the Williamsburg market area. Much of this land area, however, is attributable to the several large commercial campgrounds located in the Lightfoot area. Nevertheless, the Bypass Road corridor, with its existing motels and restaurants, and the Route 199/I-64 interchange area where Water Country USA is located, represent the primary tourist commercial areas.

There are a few tourist commercial activities concentrated in the Yorktown area as well as several motels along Route 17; however, the latter facilities tend to serve a transient business market rather than a tourist market in most cases.

- **Limited:** For the most part low-intensity businesses and professional offices are scattered throughout the commercial areas of the County. There are, however, several areas where small clusters or concentrations of these types of activities have located including the Victory Boulevard, Heritage Square, and Grafton areas and the Route 17/Cook Road triangle.

Industrial

The 1,500 acres devoted to industrial land uses represent 3.4% of the County's non-military land area. The great majority of this industrial land area is utilized by the Amoco oil refinery and the Virginia Power generating plant, both located on the Goodwin Neck peninsula. These two operations comprise the major portion of the General Industrial activities in York County. Also included in the General Industrial category for the purposes of this analysis were the numerous junkyards at the southern end of the Route 17 corridor. Primarily, the basis of the categorization as heavy industrial uses was the impact that these activities tend to have on their surroundings in terms of characteristics such as noise, dust, odor, traffic generation, and visual appearance.

Limited Industrial activities are scattered throughout the County and are in many cases located in the midst of commercially oriented areas. The County has experienced a considerable increase in the amount of limited industrial development in recent years, largely as a result of the efforts of the Industrial Development Authority. Examples of this activity are the Greene, Bethel, Victory, Busch, and Ewell industrial parks. In addition, the industrial "shell" building constructed by the Industrial Development Authority in 1997 will serve as the anchor of the York River Commerce Park, a 90-acre light industrial park located off Old York-Hampton Highway.

Public/Semi-Public

Public and semi-public uses consume a total of 1,220 acres, or 2.7% of the non-military land area. Included in the public classification are the County's public school facilities, fire stations, and office buildings, the State operated Victory Center at Yorktown, post offices, and the Commonwealth of Virginia's Emergency Fuel Depot property near Cheatham Annex.

The semi-public classification of land uses consists primarily of churches, however, a large portion of the land area is attributable to the Colonial Coast Girl Scout Council camp in the Skimino area of the County.

Military

Military landholdings account for approximately 20,930 acres, or 31.9% of the County's gross land area. Included under this classification are the following:

- Bethel Manor military housing complex

- U. S. Coast Guard Reserve Training Center
- Naval Weapons Station
- Naval Fuel Depot
- Cheatham Annex Naval Supply Center
- Camp Peary

As previously noted, this vast amount of military property exerts a major influence on land use and development patterns in York County. Most notable is the fact that the Naval Weapons Station “divides” the County into its “upper” and “lower” portions.

Open Space

For the purposes of this analysis, Open Space has been divided into the following three sub-categories:

- **Recreation and Conservation areas:** Lands identified under this category include the Colonial National Historical Park, York County's Back Creek, Charles E. Brown and New Quarter Parks, the City of Williamsburg's Waller Mill Park, and the extensive holdings of the Newport News and Williamsburg Waterworks (Harwood's Mill, Lee Hall, and Waller Mill watersheds). The 15,470 acres that these uses occupy represent 34.7% of the County's non-military land area.

- **Agriculture:** Commercially productive agricultural activities account for an estimated 1,300 acres or 2.9% of the County's non-military land area. The majority of these activities are concentrated in the Lightfoot and Skimino areas. Several other agricultural operations are spread throughout the County; however, none are extensive. In general, agricultural activities in York County contribute more to the perception of a rural atmosphere than they do to the County's economic base.

- **Vacant:** Vacant and undeveloped, privately-controlled land comprises almost 8,700 acres, or 19.4% of the County's non-military land area.

YORK COUNTY EXISTING LAND USE, 1999				
LAND USE CATEGORY	GROSS AREA (Acres)	% OF GROSS AREA	% OF NON-MILITARY LAND AREA	% OF GROSS DEVELOPABLE LAND AREA
RESIDENTIAL				
Single-Family	13,290	20.3%	29.8%	45.6%
Multi-Family	600	0.9%	1.3%	2.1%
TOTAL RESIDENTIAL	13,890	21.2%	31.1%	47.7%
COMMERCIAL	2,580	3.9%	5.8%	8.9%
INDUSTRIAL				
Limited	260	0.4%	0.6%	0.9%
General	1,240	1.9%	2.8%	4.3%
TOTAL INDUSTRIAL	1,500	2.3%	3.4%	5.1%
PUBLIC/SEMI-PUBLIC	1,220	1.9%	2.7%	4.2%
MILITARY	20,930	31.9%	NA	NA
OPEN SPACE				
C				NA
A				4.5%
Vacant	8,660	13.2%	19.4%	29.7%
TOTAL OPEN SPACE	25,430	38.8%	57.0%	NA
GRAND TOTAL	65,550	100.0%		

CHANGES SINCE 1991

Significant trends and changes in land use or factors that influenced land use for the period 1991 to 1999 (and that will continue to do so into the future) are summarized as follows:

- Residential development activity, particularly in the single-family detached category, has continued to be strong, but the number of units constructed annually has decreased considerably from the high levels experienced in the mid to late 1980s. The *cluster* or *open space subdivision* development has become the typical technique used because of its flexibility and its attractiveness in dealing with the difficult characteristics of environmentally sensitive or infill development sites. Several

townhouse/duplex developments have been undertaken and have sold well. It is likely that developer interest in seeking sites for this type of housing unit will continue.

- Most of the very large potential residential development sites in the lower County have been used. It is unlikely that major planned developments on the magnitude of Coventry, Kiln Creek or Yorkshire Downs will be proposed, simply because tracts that large are unavailable.
- The County has begun to emerge as a retail commercial destination with the development of several large scale commercial projects - most notably the Village Square Center (Super Kmart) on Victory Boulevard. The Victory Boulevard corridor between Route 134 and the Newport News city line is centrally located to the entire Peninsula and, as a result, the area has experienced a significant transformation.
- As traffic volumes have increased on Route 17 so too have the number of traffic signals. This is viewed with consternation by the average motorist but is a necessary consequence of the use of Route 17 as a major commercial corridor. In fact, the installation of traffic signals has made the adjacent commercial sites much more attractive for new and expanded commercial development.
- Some of the County's older commercial areas/developments have been rehabilitated and renovated, thus having a positive impact on the tax base and the appearance of the immediate area. This trend is likely to continue as commercial market potential increases. It has even prompted some discussion of the possibility of conversion of one of the least attractive areas of the Route 17 corridor - the junkyards - to a different type of commercial use. While this has not occurred, the emergence of the Route 17/Victory Boulevard area as a commercial destination will continue to keep attention focused on that area.
- The new Grafton Middle/High School at the intersection of Grafton Drive and Amory lane has created a major community activity center and, in conjunction with several new residential developments in the immediate area, seems to be creating renewed interest in the Grafton commercial area - an area which once was "downtown" York County.
- The construction of the County's first industrial "shell building" by the Industrial Development Authority in the new York River Commerce Park represents an additional step in the development of the Goodwin Neck industrial corridor - an area that has been zoned for such uses since 1957. This construction has the potential to stimulate the transformation of this area into a major light industrial commerce center and its development will be complemented by the planned extension of Fort Eustis Boulevard, thus providing more direct access to Interstate 64.
- The Interstate 64/Route 199 interchange area in the vicinity of Water Country is poised to become a major activity center. The future development potential of the area has been enhanced by the acquisition of the approximately 900-acre "Whittakers Mill" property (and Water Country) by the Anheuser-Busch Corporation. This has infused significant capital resources and heightened the development potential of the area.
- The completion of the segment of Route 199 between Interstate 64 and Route 60 parallel to Lightfoot Road has created a major commercial corridor for the County. The County has developed a water system to serve the area and sewer service is also available. Some new development has already occurred but the full potential of the area is yet to be realized. With the completion of the full interchange at International Parkway and the completion of the International Parkway/Mooretown Road connection to the Bypass Road corridor set to occur in the next several years, this area is poised to also become a major enhancement to the County's non-residential tax base.